

Short Communication

Cycas scratchleyana F.Muell. (Cycadaceae),
a new species record for Queensland and Australia

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The genus *Cycas* has a wide distribution in Australia, the Western Pacific, Malesia, Asia and Madagascar. Thirty-eight species have been recently recognised as occurring in Australia (including its offshore islands and territories) and six species in adjacent Papuaia (Indonesia – Papua Province, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands) (Hill 1996, 1998, 2004; Hill *et al.* 2004; Claussen 2005). Queensland has 17 species and is a major centre of diversity for *Cycas* (Forster 2004).

In 2003, Bruce Wannan and Ing Toh collected material of a *Cycas* on Mer (Murray) Island in Torres Strait. Only a single plant was observed (B. Wannan, pers. comm. 2004). This collection is conspecific with *Cycas scratchleyana* F.Muell. known previously only from Papua New Guinea (Hill 1994; Hill *et al.* 2004); hence their collection is a new species record for both Queensland and Australia. Although the collection is from \pm natural vegetation (Regional Ecosystem RE 3.2.5., but floristically closer to RE 3.2.13), the collectors note that it was made in sandy soil in a village.

Although Mer Island is politically part of Queensland, it is immediately adjacent to the mainland of Papua New Guinea and has at least one other plant species (*Alectryon repandodentatus* Radlk.) for which it is the only locality in Australia. One other species (*Apluda mutica* L.) is found only there and on two other islands in Torres Strait with regard to its Australian occurrence.

Mer Island is quite small in area and hosts a variably sized population of people with many

links to the mainland of Papua New Guinea. While it is feasible that this cycad may have been transported from the mainland of Papua New Guinea at some time and perhaps planted at the locality it is unlikely to have happened in recent times due to the large size of the plant (c. 15–16 m tall). Alternatively the seed may have been transported as a food source in the past, as species of *Cycas* are utilised in this manner by indigenous people in Australia (Beck 1992) and Papua New Guinea (see Hill 1994 for a list of vernacular names for this species in Papua New Guinea). This cycad colony on Mer Island is geographically quite close to other recorded populations of *C. scratchleyana* in Papua New Guinea, hence it is also quite possible that the population is natural and its occurrence on the island is without anthropogenic influence.

***Cycas scratchleyana* F.Muell.**, *Vict. Nat.* 2(2): 18 (1885). **Type:** Papua New Guinea. Mt Bedford, Jala-River, Dedouri-Country, 1883, *W. Armit s.n.* (holo: MEL 68059; iso: K *n.v.*).

Specimens examined (all at BRI): Papua New Guinea. CENTRAL PROVINCE: Kubuna, Nov 1938, *Brass 5643*; Kuriva Sawmill, Hiritano Highway road leading into company dry dock, 9° 10'S, 147° 00'E, *Larivita & Maru LAE70598*; Mekeo district, Jul/Aug 1918, *White 794*. GULF PROVINCE: Ihu, Vailalu River, Feb 1926, *Brass 994*; above Purari River, 63 km at 65° from Baimuru, 7° 15'S, 145° 20'E, Mar 1974, *Croft et al. LAE61174*; Mina River, upstream from limit of ship navigability, Mar 1974, *Womersley NGF46475*. MILNE BAY PROVINCE: track between Tutubea & Lake Lavu, Fergusson Island, 9° 33'S, 150° 45'E, Nov 1976, *Croft et al. LAE68785A*; c. 2 km inland of Medino, N Coast of Cape Vogel Peninsula, Sep 1954, *Hoogland 4750*. WESTERN PROVINCE: Fly

River, 528 mile Camp, May 1936, *Brass* 6752. **Australia, Queensland.** COOK DISTRICT: Mer (Murray Island) in Torres Strait, 9° 55'S, 144° 02'E, May 2003, *Wannan* 2886 & *Toh*.

References

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